Digital Public Service Evaluation in Brazil: Federal Managers' Perspectives and Improvement Opportunities

Glauco V. Pedrosa¹, Edna Dias Canedo¹, Wander Pereira ¹, Rejane M. da C. Figueiredo²

¹University of Brasília (UnB), Brasília, DF, Brazil

{glauco.pedrosa, ednacanedo, wandercleber, rejanecosta}@unb.br

Abstract. This study explores the challenges and perceptions of federal public managers regarding the current evaluation system for digital public services in Brazil. Through two focus groups conducted with 20 managers from 11 public institutions, the main difficulties in using the existing evaluation system were identified, along with potential adjustments to enhance its effectiveness. The focus group discussions generated various recommendations for improving the system's efficiency and usability, including increasing the visibility of the evaluation function, automating data collection and analysis, and clearly distinguishing between the evaluation of customer service and the overall service itself. This work provides a structured account of the focus group discussions and offers recommendations based on these insights, aiming to improve the delivery of digital public services by making them more efficient, transparent, and user-centered.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation is a critical driver of innovation in public administration, enabling governments to enhance service delivery, policy implementation, and citizen engagement [Marsicano et al. 2024]. Despite significant investments in digital platforms and tools, many public sector transformation initiatives still fall short of expectations [Sarantis et al. 2022]. Studies indicate that around 80% of such initiatives fail to deliver their intended outcomes due to factors such as insufficient leadership, poor communication, limited resources, and bureaucratic inertia [Dillon et al. 2023].

In Brazil, the federal government has made notable strides in digitalization through initiatives like the Digital Citizenship Platform and the successive editions of the Digital Government Strategy (EGD). The introduction of a public service evaluation API in 2018 was a key step towards institutionalizing user feedback and promoting service quality [Menezes et al. 2022]. However, the effectiveness of current evaluation mechanisms remains underexplored from the perspective of public managers, who are responsible for interpreting user data and transforming it into actionable improvements.

This work aims to investigate the main challenges faced by Brazilian federal managers in evaluating digital public services, and to identify concrete opportunities for improvement. Using qualitative data from two focus groups with managers from 11 public institutions, this research sheds light on the structural and operational gaps in the current system. The study also draws from international benchmarking to propose evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the evaluation process and fostering a more citizencentered digital government.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses international benchmarks and previous research on digital service evaluation. Section 3 describes the qualitative methodology adopted, focusing on focus groups with federal public managers. Section 4 highlights the main challenges identified in the evaluation of digital public services. Section 5 proposes practical suggestions to address the challenges identified. Section 6 reflects on the methodological limitations of the study. Finally, Section 7 summarizes the findings and reinforces the relevance of improving evaluation systems to enhance digital public services in Brazil.

2. Background

Several countries have adopted advanced practices to assess the quality and user satisfaction of digital public services by combining performance indicators, external audits, and active user feedback [Soares et al. 2019]. Denmark, for instance, applies a Digital Maturity Index, regular user satisfaction surveys, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), while promoting co-creation through participatory platforms and workshops with citizens [Scupola and Mergel 2022]. Estonia stands out for its use of technologies like the X-Road platform, which enables secure and automated service delivery. Evaluation in Estonia is based on usability, accessibility, efficiency, and ongoing feedback collection [Espinosa and Pino 2024, Margetts and Naumann 2017]. In the United Kingdom, assessments include real-time feedback, post-transaction surveys, and broader instruments like the UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI). The evaluation criteria emphasize usability, accessibility, performance, and interoperability [Harvey et al. 2023]. These approaches reflect a commitment to delivering more efficient, citizen-centered, and continuously improving digital public services.

In Brazil, the assessment of citizen satisfaction with public services at the federal level is a structured and legally supported process, primarily governed by Law No. 13.460/2017, which establishes the rights of users of public services and mechanisms for their participation in service evaluation [Presidência da República do Brasil 2017]. One of the main instruments for gauging satisfaction is the *Pesquisa de Satisfação do Usuário*, coordinated by the Ministry of Management and Innovation in Public Services (MGI). This survey is applied through digital channels, especially the federal government's integrated portal *gov.br*. After using a service, users are invited to rate their experience based on criteria such as ease of access, clarity of information, and resolution time. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of the service evaluation tool which simultaneously evaluates satisfaction and perceived quality.

Although Brazil has established mechanisms to collect user satisfaction data through digital platforms and institutional tools, a critical question remains: how effectively are these data being used to inform service improvement? This study aims to investigate the perception of public service managers regarding the usefulness of satisfaction assessment tools in enhancing service quality and increasing user satisfaction.

3. Study Settings

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, employing focus groups [Kontio et al. 2004]. The goal is to gather insights and suggestions from public managers regarding the digital service evaluation system in Brazil. Two focus groups were

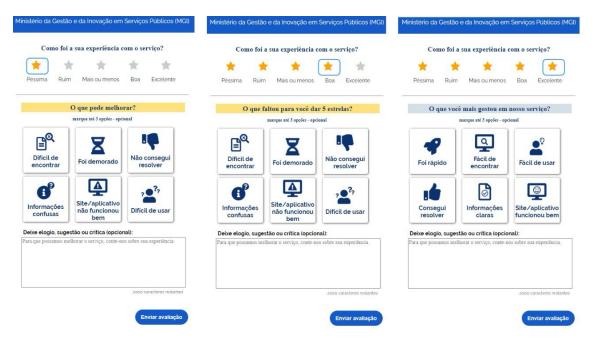


Figure 1. Brazilian tool for assessing satisfaction and quality of federal services.

held, both conducted online via Microsoft Teams, each lasting approximately two hours. Unlike quantitative methods such as structured surveys, focus groups allow participants to express their opinions in a more open and detailed manner, enabling a richer and more contextualized understanding of the challenges faced. One of the key advantages of focus groups is the interactive dynamic among participants, which encourages the exchange of ideas and the collective construction of solutions.

The focus group format encourages debate and allows individuals to reflect on their own practices as they listen to the experiences of other participants [Kontio et al. 2004]. In the context of digital public services, where challenges and solutions can vary significantly from one agency to another, this exchange is essential for identifying common problems and innovative solutions that can be applied more broadly. Furthermore, focus groups enable researchers to capture nuances in responses, detecting, for instance, contradictions or hesitations that might go unnoticed in other research formats [Kontio et al. 2004].

The first focus group took place on September 24, 2024, with the participation of 10 managers from various agencies of the Brazilian federal public administration, including the Digital Government Secretariat (SGD), the Federal Comptroller's Office (CGU), the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI), the Federal Police, the Central Bank, the Ministry of Social Development, the National Institute of Social Security (INSS), among others. The second focus group was held on October 1, 2024, with the presence of 10 managers representing institutions such as the Federal Revenue, Federal Savings Bank, the SUS Ombudsman, the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In total, 20 managers from 11 public agencies participated in the two focus groups. Table 1 presents the full list of institutions that participated in the focus groups.

The main objective of the focus group was to investigate how Service Evaluation

Agency	Number of Participants
National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI)	5
Federal Revenue Service	2
Federal Police	2
Ministry of Social Development	2
Central Bank of Brazil	2
SUS Ombudsman	2
Office of the Comptroller General (CGU)	1
National Institute of Social Security (INSS)	1
Federal Savings Bank (Caixa Econômica Federal)	1
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1
SouGov	1
Total:	20

Table 1. Participating Institutions in the Focus Groups

can improve the user experience of digital public services. Initially, the moderator of the group presented the objective and explained how the study would be conducted. Additionally, the key attributes used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of electronic services (e-services) in the United Kingdom, Estonia, and Denmark (Section 2) were introduced.

During the sessions, a semi-structured question guide was used, addressing three main themes: (1) the managers' perceptions of the evaluation of digital public services; (2) the main challenges faced by the managers regarding the evaluation system; and (3) suggestions to improve the efficiency and usefulness of the evaluations. The discussions were recorded and later analyzed through a content analysis approach, aiming to identify patterns and categories of responses that reflected the perceptions and challenges reported by the managers. The participants' statements were coded and categorized into themes such as system visibility, usability, transforming data into managerial information, and the distinction between the evaluation of service quality and service delivery.

The diversity of the participants, representing different federal government agencies, allowed the collection of a wide range of perspectives on the challenges faced in evaluating digital services, providing a comprehensive and multifaceted view of the topic.

4. Results and Discussions

The analysis of the two focus groups revealed a series of perceptions and challenges faced by public managers regarding the digital services evaluation system in Brazil. Four main areas of discussion were identified: (i) visibility of the evaluation system, (ii) difficulties in using evaluation data, (iii) confusion between the evaluation of service quality and service delivery, and (iv) lack of user engagement in the evaluation process. These topics will be detailed below.

4.1. Visibility of the Evaluation System

One of the most commonly cited issues was the low visibility of the evaluation functionality in digital services. Many managers reported that citizens are unable to find the option to evaluate services, which harms the amount of feedback collected. One participant said:

"I myself, as a user, have never noticed the evaluation button on the digital services I use, and I believe this is the reality for many other users."

This lack of visibility was pointed out as a critical factor limiting the reach of the system. Another manager corroborated this statement, adding that the low prominence of the evaluation functionality directly impacts data collection:

"Without greater visibility, users end up not providing feedback, which reduces the quantity and quality of the evaluations we receive."

To improve this situation, several participants suggested that the evaluation system should be more visible and accessible on service websites, with automatic reminders or pop-ups at the end of each digital transaction to encourage users to leave their comments.

The lack of visibility in Brazil's evaluation system mirrors the practices in Denmark, Estonia, and the United Kingdom, where transparency and accessibility in digital services are prioritized. These countries integrate visible feedback systems to ensure that users can easily provide input, which enhances service improvements.

4.2. Difficulties in Using Evaluation Data

Another important challenge raised by the managers was the difficulty in transforming evaluation data into useful management information for decision-making. Many mentioned that the data is extracted in a fragmented and poorly structured manner, which delays the analysis process. One manager said:

"Our team faces significant difficulties in organizing evaluation data and transforming it into management reports. This delays the implementation of service improvements."

Additionally, communication between managers and technical teams responsible for the evaluation systems was mentioned as a weak point. One participant highlighted:

"Every time doubts arise about the data, communication is mostly done via email, which makes the process very slow and inefficient."

This communication difficulty limits the proper use of evaluation data, preventing managers from using the information proactively to improve services. Another recurring point was the lack of appropriate filters to organize data according to the needs of the agencies. One manager said:

"Often, the system filters do not work well for our specific requirements, which forces us to manually sort the data."

This situation not only overloads the teams but also increases the risk of errors in the analysis. Similar issues are seen in global best practices, but Denmark and Estonia, for example, have automated processes and clear systems to manage and utilize feedback data effectively.

4.3. Confusion Between Service Evaluation and Customer Service Evaluation

One of the most complex issues raised during the focus groups was the difficulty users face in separating the evaluation of the customer service provided from the evaluation of the service itself. This confusion directly impacts the accuracy and usefulness of the feedback data collected. Several managers highlighted that negative evaluations are often

driven by frustrations with the final result of the process, even if the service itself was delivered correctly and efficiently. One participant said:

"Many citizens rate the digital service poorly because they did not get the desired result, such as the approval of a benefit or the issuance of a document, even though the process was carried out correctly by the team".

This scenario is common, for instance, in situations where the service requires analysis or judgment, and the final outcome may be unfavorable to the user, even if the entire process followed the established procedures. Another manager added:

"Users often do not understand that what is being evaluated is the process and customer service, not the final result. This lack of understanding leads to unfair evaluations, which compromises our ability to identify which aspects really need to be improved."

This point was emphasized by several participants, who mentioned the need to better educate users about what should really be evaluated. The confusion is intensified in services where the final decision does not solely depend on the agency providing the service, such as in cases of Ombudsman services or in the processes of granting documents and patents. One manager mentioned:

"Many times, the user negatively evaluates the Ombudsman because their problem was not resolved, not understanding that the Ombudsman only mediates and does not have the power to decide on the final solution."

This situation also occurs in other areas, such as the analysis of administrative requests, where the process is correctly executed, but the final outcome may frustrate the citizen. Furthermore, in many digital public services, the response time or technical criteria for approval also negatively influence the user's perception. Another manager exemplified:

"When the service has a long deadline or the request is denied, the citizen tends to rate the whole process poorly, without considering that the service was adequate and that the deadlines are within what is legally required."

This confusion makes it difficult to separate the process from the result, impacting the effectiveness of evaluations as a tool for service improvement. To mitigate this problem, participants suggested that the evaluation system clearly distinguish between evaluating the customer service provided and evaluating the service as a whole. One idea presented was to create specific questions for the user to evaluate the customer service separately from the final result of the process. A manager suggested:

"It would be interesting if the system directly asked about the experience with the customer service, before requesting an evaluation of the overall service, thus separating the two aspects."

The introduction of a separate evaluation would allow managers to more accurately identify the areas that truly need adjustment. For example, if the service is well-rated but the service itself receives negative evaluations, this would indicate that the issues lie in the administrative process or decision-making criteria, not in the user relationship. This distinction would be essential for implementing improvements more effectively. Another point raised was the importance of providing feedback to the user during the process,

especially in services with long deadlines or complex outcomes. One manager suggested:

"If the user were informed in real-time about the progress of their request, they could better understand the process, and this would help reduce negative evaluations based on incorrect expectations about the time or result."

Transparency about the status of the request can reduce frustration and improve the citizen's understanding of how the service works. In summary, the confusion between the evaluation of customer service and the service itself is one of the main challenges faced by public managers regarding the evaluation of digital services. This difficulty directly affects the usefulness of evaluations as a tool for improvement, since many users base their evaluations on frustrations with the final result, rather than focusing on the process or the service received. Implementing mechanisms that clearly differentiate these aspects is essential to improving the accuracy of evaluations and allowing managers to more effectively identify areas that need improvement.

The concern of users conflating service quality with the outcomes (such as approval or denial of requests) also links with the importance of clarity in evaluation practices, as emphasized in international benchmarks. For example, Denmark and Estonia use clear, separate evaluation metrics to focus on specific aspects of service delivery and customer service.

4.4. Lack of User Engagement in the Evaluation Process

Another recurring theme discussed during the focus groups was the lack of user engagement in the evaluation process of digital public services. Many managers reported that the low volume of feedback received compromises the ability to obtain a representative and accurate view of citizen satisfaction. This lack of engagement limits the usefulness of the evaluation system as a tool to improve services and identify usability issues. One participant commented:

"We realize that, despite having an evaluation system available, most citizens simply do not use it. Participation is very low, which makes it difficult to have a consistent sample of feedback."

This problem was corroborated by several managers, who pointed out that the lack of visibility of the evaluation functionality is one of the causes of low engagement. Although this issue is related to visibility, as discussed earlier, the problem goes beyond that and also involves the users' perception of value. Many citizens do not feel motivated to provide feedback, either due to a lack of awareness of the impact their opinions can have or because they feel that the evaluation will not result in any concrete changes. One manager highlighted:

"Citizens often do not see the importance of evaluating services. To them, it seems like their evaluations will not have an impact or will not be considered."

This feeling of disconnection between feedback and subsequent actions undermines user participation. Another aspect related to low engagement is the complexity and time required to complete the evaluations. As one participant shared:

"The evaluation process needs to be simple and quick. If it's too long or complicated, people give up before finishing. Ideally, it should be very direct and intuitive."

The lack of simplicity in the evaluation process was cited as a demotivating factor, especially when citizens are in a hurry or when the digital service requires additional steps after using the service. The user experience in providing feedback is crucial to ensuring their participation. If the process is viewed as an additional task or seen as bureaucratic, citizens may choose to ignore it. One manager suggested:

"We need to make the evaluation process easy and pleasant for the user. Perhaps with short forms, objective questions, and a user-friendly interface."

Making the evaluation experience more fluid and less tiring would be a way to increase engagement. Additionally, the lack of feedback to citizens about actions taken based on their evaluations was pointed out as an obstacle to continuous engagement. One manager said:

"Citizens want to know that their feedback is being taken seriously and that it will result in improvements. If they never receive a response or do not see changes, they will stop evaluating."

The lack of transparency about how feedback is being used creates a sense of futility in the evaluation process.

5. Recommendations for Improvement

Based on the discussions held during the two focus groups, the participating managers suggested several improvements to increase the efficiency and usefulness of the digital public service evaluation system in Brazil. The recommendations focused on five main areas: system visibility, simplicity in data collection, separation between evaluating customer service and the service itself, user engagement, and feedback on the impact of evaluations. The following are the detailed recommendations, illustrated with anonymous quotes from the participants.

5.1. Increase the Visibility of the Evaluation Feature

One of the main concerns raised was the low visibility of the evaluation feature in digital services. Many managers reported that users have difficulty finding the evaluation button, resulting in few feedback submissions. One participant commented: "I think many users don't even know they can evaluate the services. The button is hidden or not very prominent. If the goal is to collect more evaluations, it needs to be more visible." This recommendation was widely supported by the managers, who suggested changes to the design of digital service platforms. "Ideally, at the end of each service, there should be an automatic reminder or pop-up requesting the evaluation. Something the user can't ignore," suggested another participant.

These reminders could be presented in a non-intrusive way but be visible enough for citizens to perceive the importance of providing feedback. Furthermore, some managers proposed that the evaluation button should always be visible on all pages of digital services, reinforcing the possibility of evaluation at any point during the user's interaction with the service. "The button should be there, present at all times, so the user can evaluate the service at any moment, whether at the beginning, during, or after using the service," commented one manager.

5.2. Facilitate Data Collection and Utilization

Another recurring point in the discussions was the difficulty in collecting, organizing, and utilizing evaluation data efficiently. Many managers reported that the process of extracting data is manual and fragmented, which overwhelms the teams and hinders the generation of managerial reports. One participant explained: "Data collection is a challenge. The team has to extract everything manually, and that generates a lot of work. It would be great if the system could automate this process and generate reports directly."

In addition to automation, managers also suggested improvements to the data analysis interface. One manager pointed out the need for more specific filters to facilitate analysis: "The filters we have today do not meet the needs of all agencies. We need more customization so that each institution can organize and visualize the data in a way that makes sense to them."

These changes in how data is collected and organized would allow for faster and more accurate analysis, freeing teams to focus on implementing improvements based on the evaluations received. Another participant suggested: "With a more automated system, we could identify problematic areas much faster and act more effectively to correct the issues."

5.3. Separate the Evaluation of Service and Customer Service

One of the most frequent suggestions was the clear separation between evaluating the customer service and evaluating the digital service itself. As mentioned earlier, many citizens tend to negatively evaluate the service based on the final result, without considering the quality of customer service. One participant commented: "Users confuse things. They give bad ratings to the service because they didn't get what they wanted, even though the service was excellent."

To address this, managers proposed that the evaluation system be adjusted to separately ask about customer service and the final result. "If we had two separate evaluations, one about the service and another about the service as a whole, we could more clearly identify where the problems are," explained one manager. This distinction would allow managers to assess precisely whether the issues pointed out by users are related to customer service or the service process itself.

One participant also suggested that the evaluation system include a section where users could specify the reason for their dissatisfaction: "It would be helpful if users could specify why they are dissatisfied, whether it's because of the service or the final result. This would help us identify exactly where we need to improve." This suggestion was widely supported, as it would provide more detailed information to guide corrective actions.

5.4. Encourage User Engagement in Evaluations

Another important topic discussed was the lack of user engagement in the evaluation process. As mentioned, many citizens simply do not participate, limiting the representativeness of the feedback. To increase participation, several managers suggested creating incentives for users to feel motivated to evaluate the services. One participant suggested: "We could create a simple reward system, like points or certificates, for those who evaluate the services. That could encourage more people to participate."

Another manager mentioned the possibility of symbolic recognition, such as rankings or statistics that show the most active users in the evaluation process: "Recognizing users who frequently evaluate could be a way to encourage more participation. People like being recognized, even if it's something symbolic." Although the value of the incentives did not need to be significant, the simple act of rewarding participation could create a more active feedback culture.

In addition to incentives, it was suggested that the evaluation process be simplified. Many managers agreed that long or complicated evaluations demotivate users. One participant emphasized: "Evaluations need to be quick and objective. No one wants to spend too much time answering long questionnaires. If the process is simple, more people will participate."

5.5. Provide Feedback to Users on the Impact of Their Evaluations

Finally, managers emphasized the importance of providing feedback to citizens on the impact of their evaluations. The lack of transparency about how feedback is used creates the perception that evaluations are useless, which discourages users from participating in the future. One participant commented: "Many times, the citizen evaluates the service, but never knows what happened with that feedback. If they don't see changes or don't get any response, they lose the motivation to evaluate again."

One suggestion was the creation of periodic reports showing how evaluations are being used to improve services. "It would be interesting to send reports or newsletters to users who evaluate, showing what has been improved based on their feedback", suggested one manager. This type of communication would reinforce the idea that users' opinions are valuable and are being considered.

Another proposal was the creation of a public dashboard where citizens could see, in real-time, the changes implemented based on the evaluations. One participant suggested: "A results dashboard showing what has changed based on feedback would be a good way to give transparency to the process and show citizens that their evaluations make a difference". This constant feedback could create a positive cycle of engagement, in which users feel more connected to the process and are more likely to continue evaluating the services.

The practice of providing continuous feedback to users about how their evaluations have impacted changes in services can be complemented by the transparency practices adopted in Denmark and Estonia, where public reports and result dashboards are used to show the improvements made based on citizens' feedback. Implementing similar communication in Brazil would help create a positive engagement cycle, where users would feel more motivated to participate and see the effects of their evaluations.

6. Threats to Validity

Although the research aimed for a comprehensive analysis of digital service managers' perceptions regarding user feedback collection, there are some threats to the validity of the results that merit discussion. The main threats identified include the following: Internal validity may be threatened by response bias in the focus groups, as participants—primarily digital services managers—could be influenced by institutional practices or policies. Their responses might reflect organizational norms rather than the

broader experience of digital services, limiting causal attribution between the variables studied. To mitigate this, future studies could include a wider range of participants from diverse organizations and sectors, allowing for a more representative sample of experiences and perspectives.

External validity could be compromised as the focus group participants were not randomly selected, potentially representing a specific subset of digital service managers. This limits generalizability to other sectors or geographical regions. To address this limitation, subsequent research could aim to recruit a more diverse sample, potentially through stratified sampling or including participants from various regions or sectors, ensuring a broader representation of digital services.

Construct validity may be affected by how the study's concepts were represented. Pre-existing definitions of a "good" feedback system and technical jargon used by the participants could have shaped their responses, potentially limiting the exploration of alternative perspectives. To mitigate this, we provided clear and precise definitions of key concepts beforehand and use more neutral language to ensure a wider range of responses.

Conclusion validity may be threatened by the subjective nature of the focus group responses, which can be influenced by group dynamics or conformity to dominant ideas. This could lead to biased or inconsistent results, affecting the reliability of conclusions drawn from the data. To minimize this threat, facilitators adopted strategies such as encouraging individual responses before group discussions, ensuring that every participant had an opportunity to voice their opinion. Additionally, we employed more structured discussion format with clear guidelines for participation reduced the influence of dominant voices and improved the consistency of the data collected.

7. Conclusions

This study explored the challenges and perceptions of public managers regarding the evaluation of digital public services in Brazil. Based on focus groups conducted with 20 managers from 11 Brazilian public administration agencies, four main areas of difficulty were identified: insufficient visibility of the evaluation system, complexity in using the collected data, confusion between the evaluation of service delivery and the service itself, and low user engagement.

These challenges suggest that, despite advances in the digitalization of services, there are still significant gaps that need to be addressed in order to optimize the feedback system and, consequently, the management of digital services. Implementing the discussed recommendations—such as improving the visibility of the evaluation feature, automating processes, and creating a clear distinction between the aspects being evaluated—are essential steps to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the evaluation system.

By providing a more transparent and accessible system, it is expected that both managers and citizens will benefit from a more efficient evaluation process, enabling continuous feedback and ongoing improvements in Brazil's digital public services. Thus, this study contributes to understanding the perceptions of managers and offers concrete directions to enhance user experience and administrative efficiency.

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